

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

- Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -

Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad

Sunday, February 28, 2010

U.S. Partners with American Soybean Association to Assess Iraqi Ports - During the week of February 15, USDA partnered with the American Soybean Association to assess barriers to bulk shipments into Iraq's Umm Qasr and Khor al Zubayr ports.

The team determined that the port of Umm Qasr has in place the infrastructure and support services to handle Iraqi demand for imported feeds. However, current Ministry of Agriculture testing procedures are time consuming and make vessel-sized shipments uneconomic. We are now working to change this policy. In this photo, ASA-IM's Tim Burleigh examines bagged Indian soybean meal. *This was the first visit to Iraq in over a decade by an American producer group representative.*



Iraqi Crop Progress Report - The latest outlook for national winter grain production is quite favorable due to increased winter grain acreage and beneficial season-to-date rainfall. Iraqi provincial authorities indicate that national grain area has increased this year, but will not recover to near-normal levels recorded prior to 2008. National wheat area, inclusive of the Kurdish regions, is estimated at 1.47 million hectares (up 22 % from last year, but 22 % below normal), while barley area is estimated at 1.17 million hectares (up 134 % from last year, but down 19 % from normal). These initial acreage reports indicate that grain production could significantly improve over the past two drought-affected seasons, but also that Iraq is likely to experience a 3rd consecutive below-normal winter grain harvest. USDA/Baghdad will submit its Grain and Feed report March 10 with complete grain production, supply, and demand estimates for Iraq.

Iraq Buys More U.S. Rice – The Grain Board of Iraq has indicated to us that ADM won a recent tender to supply 29,000 MT of U.S. rice.

Getting UAE Visas For Iraqi Traders To Buy U.S. Food – To advance U.S. food export objectives, OAA Baghdad organized a group of 33 Iraqi food product company representatives to attend Gulfood, the Middle East's largest and most important event for the food processing and retail industries, February 21-24, 2010 in Dubai. Leaning on ATO Dubai, with a push from the Consul General vis-à-vis UAE Immigration authorities and with a nudge from the UAE's DCM in Baghdad, all Iraqi applicants were issued visas to attend the show three days before the show's start. With a U.S. contingent of 100+ exhibitors and an Iraqi market starved for consumer-ready food products, we estimate that USD millions in new business will be generated from contacts made at this exhibition.

Personnel Update – There are currently 37 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, or embedded with U.S. military units. The Forest Service's Bob Glasgow just departed after a year of outstanding service as the PRT Liaison. He will be replaced by Rod Brenes from PRT Babil. Anthony Drew arrived in Baghdad to be the Extension/Education Advisor. Also, APHIS/WS' Chris Bowser departs Balad air base March 6.

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